

WASHINGTON, D.C.- Congressman Jim Costa, D-Fresno, today declared his support for legislation being readied for introduction in both the House and Senate aimed at addressing the shortage of agriculture workers.

The AgJobs bill, Costa said, would establish a pilot earned adjustment program for agriculture workers, which would help ease the severe worker shortages being experienced by farmers in California and across the nation. "California is the leading agriculture state in the nation and agriculture is the economic engine of the Central Valley," Costa stated, adding, "We must pass AgJOBS legislation that ends the worker shortage."

Costa, noting that bipartisan support is important in getting AgJOBS legislation passed, said he was pleased that both Democrats and Republicans had signed on as lead sponsors of both the House and Senate bills.

Congressman Howard Berman, a Los Angeles County Democrat, and Utah Republican Chris Cannon are the lead House sponsors of the new AgJOBS bill. Senate sponsors include California's two Senators- Dianne Feinstein and Barbara Boxer, along with Edward Kennedy of Massachusetts, and Republican Larry Craig of Idaho and Mel Martinez of Florida. Costa will be a co-sponsor of the House AgJOBS bill.

According to reports, California agriculture suffered as much as a 20 percent shortage of workers in 2006.

Summary of the bill follows:

- Undocumented agriculture workers would be eligible for a "blue card" if they can demonstrate having worked in American agriculture for at least 150 work days over the previous two years.

- The blue card would entitle the worker to a temporary legal resident status. The total number of blue card would be capped at 1.5 million over a five-year period, and the program would sunset after five years.

- Blue card holders would be allowed to travel in and out of the United States.

- The spouses and minor children of blue card workers would be eligible to apply for a blue card if they already live in the United States. This would permit them to work and travel.

- Blue card holders would be required to work in American agriculture for an additional three years (working at least 150 work days per year) or five years (working at least 100 work days per year), before becoming eligible to apply for a green card to become a permanent legal resident.

- Before applying for a green card, participants would be required to pay a fine of \$500, show that they are current on their taxes, and show that they have not been convicted of any crime that involves bodily injury, the threat of serious bodily injury, or harm to property in excess of \$500.

- Finally, the H2-A Program would be modified so that it realistically responds to agriculture needs.

Similar legislation was introduced by Senators Feinstein and Craig in the 109th Congress, but did not pass out in the Senate.

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